

Westmont College The Horizon

Voice

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DC poster reinforces negative racial stereotyping

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Last week we celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday and the work that he did for the civil rights movement.

Through the use of civil disobedience and inspiring rhetoric, he helped turn the tide of racism and hatred in our country to make it become a nation where people "won't be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character..." Yada yada yada.

It seems that Dr. King's words have fallen on deaf ears, and that some Westmont students have become jaded regarding the issues of race and diversity on this campus. Nowhere was this more apparent than last Thursday, when a poster advertising the Azusa-Westmont game appeared in the DC.

On one side of the poster was 'Joe Westmont'-white, short hair, tall and lean, and in a clean-cut basketball uniform. On the other side, however, was an Azusa player. He was supposed to be black, had an afro, a big nose and lips, tattoos on both arms, chains, "50 cent" on his jersey, "thug life" on his belt, sagging pants and-how to put this delicately?-an enlarged crotch area.

The depiction fulfilled every derogatory stereotype of what it means to be black in America. Ironically, this was the day that I and two other students were to address the Board of Trustees about race issues on this campus.

How do I explain why such a poster was made in the first place? How do I explain the responses of many fellow students who

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said, "It's just a joke...It's not a big deal...
It's about Azusa anyway..."

How do I explain to white students why
they should be offended by this poster?

The vast majority of students will never
know what it is like to be an
underrepresented minority. Many students
(myself included) were raised in
homogeneous communities where,
unfortunately, race was not an issue.

And worst of all, the general attitude of the
American church is to skirt the issue of
diversity, because in an effort to be "not of
this world" we feel that it is too "politically
correct." Heaven forbid we should follow a
trend that strives to be inclusive and
sensitive to the feelings of others.

As the years go by, it becomes increasingly
apparent that Westmont cares deeply about
diversity and having all kinds of people
represented on our campus. But many
students seem to think it is a non-issue.

Students who receive scholarships for
being of an ethnic background have to
laugh it off when speaking with white
students. Minority students get asked,
"Why do we have to talk about this
diversity thing so much? If everyone is
equal why can't we all just stop talking
about it?" And many believe that Westmont
employs an affirmative action policy when
admitting people of different races and
ethnicities.

Students who think these things are the
white students, who have always been in
power, and who may never have to know
what it is like to be surrounded by faces so
decidedly unlike their own. The truth is,
lines are still drawn between "us" and
"them."

We have moved beyond the n-word,
segregation and the like, only to arrive at a
subversive, ignorant type of racism.

The kind where the people in power expect
everyone to conform to their standards.
The kind where we tell people, "This is
America. Everyone can make it if they try.

If they don't, they don't want to." The kind where people cannot see beyond the differently colored skin to see the face of God staring back at them.

This is the heart of the issue: we all bear the image of the Creator.

In his oft-quoted "Weight of Glory," C.S. Lewis says, "When seen in heaven...the person next to you will be someone you are strongly tempted to worship."

In Dr. Spencer's rhetoric class, we discuss how to love others through a willing abdication of power, identification with the other and service.

He says that "although we cannot look like every member of our audience, we can look for them. Where? Inside ourselves. As we better learn how to love God, and our neighbors as ourselves, we can put off our 'right' to see the world only through our own lens."

Identifying with another's joys and struggles is at the center of what Christ meant when he said "love your neighbor." Isn't that what he did with us?

As we strive to be more like Christ, can't we take off our lenses of white privilege and imagine what it's like to be black? Or Hispanic? Or Asian?

Try to imagine what it is like to walk into the DC as one of the few black students on campus and see a poster that imposes such belittling stereotypes upon people of your ethnicity. And try to imagine yourself surrounded by white students, many of whom do not care.